State of Idaho

DEPARTMENT OF INSURANCE

C.L. "BUTCH" OTTER
Governor

700 West State Street, 3rd Floor P.O. Box 83720 Boise, Idaho 83720-0043 Phone (208)334-4250 FAX # (208)334-4398 WILLIAM W. DEAL Director

NEWS RELEASE

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208-334-4312 tricia.carney@doi.idaho.gov cell 208-850-2342

Medicare Provides Assistance to Help Low-Income Beneficiaries Get Big Savings on Prescription Drug Costs

BOISE ID (May 10, 2010) – Changes to Medicare's Low-Income Subsidy Program (also known as LIS or "Extra Help") that take effect this year will enable qualified beneficiaries to save on prescription drug costs according to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

"Extra Help" can save eligible Medicare beneficiaries as much as \$3,900 per year. It is estimated that over 1.8 million people with Medicare may be eligible for "Extra Help" but are not currently enrolled to take advantage of these savings.

The Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008 makes it easier for Medicare beneficiaries to qualify for "Extra Help" by changing the way income and assets are counted in 2010. Life insurance policies will no longer be counted as a resource, and help received from family and friends to pay for household expenses like food, mortgage, rent and utilities will no longer count as income.

"These new changes to the 'Extra Help' program make it easier for more people to get help paying for their prescription drugs," said Genii Hamilton, supervisor of Senior Health Insurance Benefits Advisors (SHIBA) for the Idaho Department of Insurance. "Making ends meet shouldn't mean going without your medications. People who were turned down for 'Extra Help' before, should reapply."

To qualify, Medicare beneficiaries' incomes must be less than \$16,245 a year (or \$21,855 for married couples) and have resources limited to \$12,510 (or \$25,010 for married couples). Resources include bank accounts, stocks and bonds, but do not include houses, cars or life insurance policies.

Medicare beneficiaries, family members, trusted counselors or caregivers can apply online at www.socialsecurity.gov/prescriptionhelp or call Social Security at 1-800-772-1213 (TTY users should call 1-800-325-0778) and ask for the *Application for Help with Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Costs*.

Medicare beneficiaries may also receive assistance in their local communities. Contact SHIBA at 800-247-4422.

To learn more about Medicare prescription drug coverage, visit www.medicare.gov, or call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227). TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048.